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Greece

Grain and Feed

Karnal Bunt Disease

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Report Highlights:

EU member States, including Greece, are beginning to utilize new European Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) standardized testing methods to detect karnal bunt disease in wheat commodities. Preliminary results show that the standardized testing methods are more reliable than the subjective nature of the old testing system. The new EPPO testing standards and the modification of Greece's wheat import regulations could facilitate the resumption of U.S. wheat exports.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
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Executive Summary

Up until April 2000, Greek testing methods for karnal bunt disease served as a de facto ban on imports and transshipment of U.S. wheat. Between 1996 and 2000, Greece did not import any U.S. wheat due to high incidents of false positive results.

As a result of persistent U.S. Embassy efforts, the Greek Ministry of Agriculture in April 2000 published Ministerial Decisions No. 2326 and No.696 which amended the statutory requirements that allow for the transshipment of US wheat to the Balkans and also permit wheat exports to Greece under more commercially viable conditions. However, many wheat importers in Greece as well as wheat exporters in the United States, remain reluctant to resume wheat shipments primarily due to their belief that the testing process is too subjective.

Ministerial Decisions

The key changes made in the April 2000 Ministerial decisions made it more difficult for Greek authorities to subjectively reject wheat shipments. The statutory changes stated that shipments should not be rejected based on false positive findings in laboratory tests and only in cases where an actual pathogen is found can a cargo be denied entry into the port.

In July, Ag Athens contacted both Dr. Alivizatos, Director of the Benaki Phytopathological Institute in Kifisia, Athens and Dr. Irene Vloutoglou, Mycologist in the same Institute. Both are responsible for the Karnal Bunt Laboratory tests and they reported that Greece, along with other EU member States, is currently participating in an EU funded program which is expected to standardize and improve the testing methodology for detecting pathogens.

Preliminary results with the new European Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) show that the standardized testing methods indicate a marked improvement from the old process. Central Science Laboratory in the U.K. (CSL) and the Italian Institute for testing (ISPAVE) are also participating in the program.

Benaki Institute and the Ministry of Agriculture contacts report that the new testing methods were recently applied to a shipment of imported Mexicali durum wheat seed and were found to be free of karnal bunt pathogens. Although the results pertained only to this shipment, the outcome could be a sign that the new testing methods may well be an improvement from the old process, particularly since Mexico's wheat crop is widely known to be infected with karnal bunt.

The new EPPO methodology could provide the breakthrough that wheat importers in Greece and wheat exporters in the U.S. were seeking to break the trade impasse. It is up to these parties to take the initiative and make the most of the opportunities provided to them by the April 2000 Ministerial decisions.

In other developments, additional discussions with U.S. Embassy representatives and industry contacts revealed that karnal bunt may not be the principal issue limiting U.S. wheat exports, but rather pricing. Wheat imports from the Black Sea region are substantially lower in price and have lower transportation costs. During the past two years, Greece has imported almost 300,000 MT annually, for milling and animal feed purposes.